

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

HANDOUT 12-2

Defining Psychological Disorders

Instructions: Read through the case studies that follow. After you read each one, decide whether you think that the individual described is displaying a psychological disorder. Go with your initial “gut” instinct for now.

Andrew has led a turbulent life. As a young child, he skipped school more often than he attended. When he did attend, he was a frequent behavior problem, often getting into fights with other boys. He was finally expelled from school altogether after stabbing another student in his high school class. Since then he has not held a job for any length of time. Soon after his expulsion, he began supplementing his income by breaking into homes and stealing whatever he could get his hands on. However, he appears to feel no guilt about this behavior. Although he has never been in a committed relationship, he has several children, whom he never sees, due partly to the fact that he frequently moves from town to town. Despite these characteristics, Andrew is a colorful and entertaining person and has a certain charm. If asked, he will tell you that he is quite happy with his current life-style.

_____ Has a Psychological Disorder _____ Does not have a Psychological Disorder

Barbara was generally a happy child and had many friends in high school. She made very good grades and decided to go on to college and then to law school. After her first year of law school, she began to notice periods of “feeling down.” At first she ignored this, but after a year or so, these episodes began to get worse. When she started paying more attention, she noticed that the episodes usually began about a week before her period and ended a few days after her period began. In addition to feeling depressed during that time, she also was overly sensitive to criticism. Often, her appetite would increase, and she would especially crave sweets. Sometimes she found it difficult to concentrate on her studies during this time, and she often lacked the energy to do much of anything except watch television.

_____ Has a Psychological Disorder _____ Does not have a Psychological Disorder

Charles is the third of seven children. He attended school in the suburbs of a large city, where he made average grades. He dated a bit in high school and had several close friends. During vacations, he worked in his father’s garage, learning all he could about automobiles. After high school, Charles took a job as a mechanic in the garage. However, Charles was beginning to feel different from his co-workers. He began to realize that he was attracted to one of his customers, a man with whom he had gone to school. When Charles realized this, he became very confused and felt angry with himself for having such feelings. Although he tried to convince himself that the feelings would go away over time, they did not, and Charles finally admitted to himself that he was a homosexual. Currently, he is in a monogamous relationship with another man but is afraid to admit his sexual orientation to friends or family, for fear of their reaction. He often finds himself preoccupied with trying to find ways to hide his orientation from them.

_____ Has a Psychological Disorder _____ Does not have a Psychological Disorder

HANDOUT 12-2 (*continued*)

Diane is the only child of two professional parents. She did well in high school and had several close friends. However, her grades suffered when she got to college, and she spent one semester on probation before she graduated. While in college, she met Don, and the two married soon after graduation and had two children of their own. Diane and Don decided that she would stay home until the children were in school, since his job with a prestigious accounting firm would allow him to support the family. Three months ago, however, Don came home from work and announced that he had met another woman and was having an affair and that he had decided to leave Diane. The divorce proceeded quickly, and, while Diane retained custody of the children, she had to move to a smaller apartment. She began looking for work but found that it was difficult to find a job, and eventually took a job she disliked. Diane often finds herself thinking about how quickly her life has changed in the last few months. She becomes very sad and will sometimes lie in bed crying after the children are asleep. She finds herself eating a lot more than she used to, and sometimes, she has difficulty getting to sleep at night.

_____ Has a Psychological Disorder _____ Does not have a Psychological Disorder

Eric was born in a rural town in the midwest. He made average grades in school and decided after graduation to purchase a farm in the area and raise corn. He very much enjoyed this lifestyle and did quite well. One day, while working in the field, an accident with a combine caused Eric to be rushed to the hospital. While doctors were able to save his life, they were not able to save his legs. Eric is now confined to a wheelchair. It has been a year since the accident and he is in a great deal of pain, which is partially controlled by morphine, which his doctor has prescribed. However, his thinking remains quite rational, and he has been able to do some work helping with the books at his parents' store. He does not enjoy this work and misses his previous activity. Recently, he confided in his doctor that he does not feel that his new life is worth living, and he has decided that he would like to end it all.

_____ Has a Psychological Disorder _____ Does not have a Psychological Disorder

Source: Davis, S. M. (2003, January). Utilizing contradictions in students' implicit definitions of "mental disorder" in an introductory psychology course. Poster presented at the 25th Annual National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology, St. Petersburg, FL, January 2003.